



State of Tennessee  
Department of State  
**Tennessee State Library and Archives**  
403 Seventh Avenue North  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0312

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND INSURANCE  
HARRY S. AVERY, SPECIAL AGENT  
COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE HEALING ARTS,  
"NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE"  
FILES  
1944-1947  
RECORD GROUP 297**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Record Group 297, Department of Commerce and Insurance, Harry S. Avery, Special Agent, Committee to Investigate Healing Arts, "Naturopathic Medicine" Files, spans the years 1944-1947. These records measure one cubic foot and were maintained by the Department of Commerce and Insurance and are in good condition. The date of transfer to the State Library and Archives is not known. These records represent the documentation of the special investigation mandated by the state legislature of Naturopathic Medicine in Tennessee. Approximately half of this collection is correspondence and the remainder has been arranged as subject files. There are no restrictions on the use of these records.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

Governor Jim McCord directed by Joint Resolution #13 of the 74<sup>th</sup> Tennessee General Assembly to appoint a committee to investigate the unauthorized practice of the healing arts and file a report with the next general assembly. The law at that time in Tennessee recognized four branches of the healing profession as the Practice of Medicine, Osteopathy, Chiropractic, and Naturopathy. The dictionary defines Naturopathy as "a system of treatment of disease emphasizing assistance to nature and including the use of natural medicinal substances and physical means (as manipulation and electrical treatment)." The committee attempted to collect correct data for each person licensed in each branch of the healing arts and requested information statewide concerning any known unauthorized practice being conducted in the state. A special investigator, Harry S. Avery, was hired from the National Board of Fire Underwriters on a contract basis to investigate any irregularities. Charges were being leveled against some Doctors of Naturopathy that they were presenting themselves to the public as medical doctors rather than Doctors of Naturopathy. Some were also accused of providing services at inflated costs and prescribing medications that only medical doctors were legally allowed to provide. An accusation was leveled against The Nashville College of Naturopathic Medicine located in Nashville as being no more than a "diploma mill" providing diplomas around the world and requiring no more than the payment of a fee in some instances. Mr. Avery's correspondence dated March 18, 1947 indicates that an indictment against 27 Naturopaths for conspiracy was issued alleging that they attended a three day lecture course at a hotel in Columbus, Ohio and were issued diplomas from a Nashville college of Naturopathic Medicine conferring the degree of Doctor of Naturopathy. The diploma stated the holder thereof had attained proficiency in "anatomy, physiology, neurology, bacteriology, pathology, diagnosis, etc." The shortage of medical doctors due to increased needs in the military because of World War II seems to have been a contributing factor that provided an opportunity for people to take advantage of the public need for medical practitioners.

Half of this collection consists of correspondence. Much of the correspondence was not addressed to or from Mr. Avery and it is not clear how the documents found their way into this collection other than they pertain to the topic under investigation. A letter from Mr. Avery to Mr. J. Davis Conavan dated January 9, 1947 indicates that he presented a report to the Tennessee Legislature. A report to the 75<sup>th</sup> General Assembly is found in the collection but the information in the report is minimal. Avery explains in a letter dated January 15, 1947 that the final report was "streamlined" in order not to give away too much evidence for the trials of those under indictment. Another letter dated January 15, 1947 from Avery indicates that there were 28 doctors indicted as a result of the investigation. All members of the Tennessee Board of Naturopathy were under indictment for issuing licenses to individuals across the nation and around the world.

The correspondence to and from Mr. Morris Cunningham, Nashville reporter for the Memphis Commercial Appeal newspaper, is helpful in deciphering the attitude of the press toward the subject of Naturopathic medicine. Included are many of his Western Union Press Messages that he wired to Memphis for publication. His editor, Mr. Frank Ahlgren, states in his correspondence that the Commercial Appeal was very much interested in exposing "quacks" and encouraged reforming state law to prevent the issuance of licenses to unauthorized practitioners.

Included in this collection is the correspondence of Dr. R. H. Hutchenson relative to the investigation. Dr. Hutchenson was the State Health Commissioner and Chairman of the Committee to Investigate the Unauthorized Practice of the Healing Arts. The committee convened on May 3, 1946. Its purpose was to investigate activities of Naturopathic physicians, Chiropractors, Osteopaths, medical doctors, as well as the activities of the Board of Examiners in the Basic Sciences. Their goal was to establish whether or not any of the boards of examiners or licensing boards had sold certificates or forged credentials such as diplomas, investigate any fake medical doctors or imposters, identify any criminal abortionists, and individual Naturopaths or Chiropractors who prescribed Sulpha, Penicillin, or toxic drugs prohibited by law.

Two books by Dr. W. L. Abt on the subject of Naturopathy are included in this collection. *Food Wise* and *Abt Method for Natural Living* can give an in-depth look into Dr. Abt's controversial theory of medical treatment.

The original order of this collection was found to be without formal arrangement. Documents were not stored or arranged in file folders therefore, the materials were arranged as logically as possible. It is suspected that some of the investigative evidence that Mr. Avery gathered was never filed or possibly he was the type of individual who could keep many of the facts in his head rather than on paper. This is the biggest weakness of this collection. Researchers will, none the less, find this collection helpful when researching the very fascinating topic of Naturopathic Medicine.

## CONTAINER LIST

### BOX 1

1. Book--*Abt Method of Natural Living* by Dr. W. L. Abt
2. Book--*Food Wise* by Dr. W. L. Abt
3. Booklets
4. Clippings
5. Correspondence--To: Avery, Harry S., 1946-1947
6. Correspondence--From: Avery, Harry S., 1946-1947
7. Correspondence--To: Cunningham, Morris, 1945
8. Correspondence--From: Cunningham, Morris, 1945-1946
9. Correspondence--General, 1944-1946
10. Correspondence--To: Hutcheson, R. H., 1945-1947
11. Correspondence--From: Hutcheson, R. H., 1945-1947
12. Correspondence--Loser, J. Carlton, Attorney General, 1945-1946
13. Correspondence--Ritts, Dr. Loy E., 1945
14. Correspondence--Walden, Dr. R. von, 1945

### BOX 2

1. Prescription Book
2. Printed Materials
3. Reports--Draft, To the 75<sup>th</sup> General Assembly
4. Reports--Committee Report to the 75<sup>th</sup> General Assembly
5. Subject File--American Soviet Medical Society, 1946
6. Subject File--Application, TN Association of Naturopathic Physicians
7. Subject File--Articles
8. Subject File--Brochures
9. Subject File--Certificate of Incorporation, Lake Haven Hospital, Inc., 1945
10. Subject File--Court Case, William Estep vs. State of TN, Petition for Rehearing, 1946
11. Subject File--Depositions, 1947
12. Subject File--Legislation, Rules, and Acts
13. Subject File--Lists, Memberships
14. Subject File--Medical Journals, "Journal of the National Medical Society", 1945-1946

15. Subject File--Medical Journals, "The Nashville News", 1946
16. Subject File--Medical Journals, "The Naturopathic Journal", 1946
17. Subject File--Newsletter, "Health Briefs", 1946
18. Subject File--Notes
19. Subject File--Register of Doctors, 1943-1946
20. Subject File--Ripley, TN Investigation, 1946
21. Subject File--Smigel, Dr. Victor, Diplomas and Class Photo